Top 10 Questions about Undergraduate Research

1. **I keep hearing that UNC is a research university. What does that mean? And, what are the benefits of attending a research university?**

   A research university is a complex and interdependent community of individuals who value the intellectual and practical benefits of original inquiry and creative expression. There are many responsibilities associated with belonging to this community. Faculty are both engaged in original research, scholarship and creative performance, and also responsible for continuing to define the boundaries between the known and the unknown, and teaching the methods that can be used to reach significant conclusions. Students also have many responsibilities as they abandon novice-like approaches to learning and embrace the more expert-like habits of mind that will be necessary to address the unsolved problems of the future. There are also many benefits of contributing to the University’s research mission, including the development of your creative abilities and confidence that you can undertake original work of significance to society.

2. **Can any student do undergraduate research, or only certain students, such as science students or honors students or seniors or…**

   ANY student may choose to do undergraduate research. In fact, students in every major and in every year are ALREADY doing undergraduate research. The opportunities are all around you and the decisions about how and when to get involved are yours to make.

3. **Why should I consider doing undergraduate research?**

   By engaging in undergraduate research, you will learn to apply what you already know to new issues that interest you, and have the opportunity to influence others. Along the way, you are likely to develop new skills, meet others with similar interests, gain confidence, define your own style, deepen your connections to the Carolina community, and use your experiences to help you choose a future career path. You may also create new works that are appreciated by the campus community and beyond, experience the joys of scholarship and the thrill of discovery, and watch with pride as your ideas are adapted and implemented by
4. **What kinds of research projects have undergraduates done?**

“Cocoons and Canaries”, a mural in Southern Village, “Uniting Human Rights and Public Art” in Oaxaca, Mexico, “Misconceptions about Women of the Middle East”, “Anatomy of Delay in the NC Court of Appeals”, “Fair Trade Clothing” in Argentina, “Russian Wetlands Policy”, “News Coverage and Education Policy”, commercial, social, scientific, and artistic entrepreneurship, community-based research… undergraduates from all schools in all majors have undertaken research projects on nearly all continents. To read more about projects conducted in specific parts of the world, please visit the world map on the OUR website. To read more about projects conducted by students in particular disciplines, please visit the SURF summary page on the OUR website.

5. **How can I get involved in doing research at UNC?**

There are many ways that you might begin. If you like the idea of beginning through course work, you might choose a First Year Seminar that includes a research experience. You could also enroll in SPCL390, “Modes of Inquiry”, which is a seminar open to all students and is designed to introduce you to research in many disciplines. Courses in every major are available to teach particular methodologies and provide opportunities for original investigations. If you like the idea of beginning through a work experience, you might choose a work-study job in a discipline of interest, respond to a posting in the OUR Database of Research Opportunities or a DTH ad. If you like the idea of beginning with a faculty member whom you know and like, you might choose courses with a variety of faculty in your area of interest, read more about what they have done by visiting their websites and finding out more about publications or performances, and then speak to them about your interests. Probably the best place to begin is with students you know who are doing research in an area that interests you. Read about what they have done in other parts of the OUR website (many have provided their contact information and would love to hear from you). Come to the annual “Celebration of Undergraduate Research” symposium to meet them and talk about what they have done. Student societies, residence hall programming, and Student Government offer other avenues to network with your peers who are doing undergraduate research. Chances are, they will be happy to tell their stories and offer advice to you.

6. **I want to explore my options for undergraduate research, but I don’t have a specific project in mind. What should I do?**

Congratulations! It takes courage to try something new, and by deciding to begin, you’ve already accomplished one of the harder steps. Many students discover that...
once they decide to get involved in undergraduate research, they become aware of
great opportunities that they simply hadn’t noticed before. As one student wrote
“… in every class [I am taking] I develop these strange brainstorms about what
topics I could research…and my grades are improving because of this new thought
train.” You might become curious about more than one topic through your courses,
current events, or by reflecting on things that really interest you. You may then
come to discover, as another student wrote, “I realize that research is really creative
and not just technical. It is amazing how noticing little details can spark an entire
series of important questions and investigations.” Another student said “ I look at
things (everyday things) in a new light and I now see or realize how much research,
time and passion is involved in all of the little components that make up our BIG
world, and that is truly amazing to me!” Your next steps will involve finding out
what is going on at Carolina in your area(s) of interest, and how you can get started.

7. I have a specific idea for a project that I want to do. How can I get
started?

You will need a faculty advisor, and there are a variety of ways to find one. You
might want to start by looking at the OUR database of research opportunities to see
if a potential advisor has posted a project description that matches your interests.
You might also want to talk to peers who have conducted research in this area,
graduate student teaching assistants, graduate research consultants, and faculty you
know and ask them for recommendations. Faculty research interests are described on
their departmental or personal websites, and university librarians can help you
identify faculty publications that relate to your interests. Although Carolina is a large
and complex research university, it is certainly possible that your exact research
interest is not represented here. You might want to keep an open mind about
research opportunities that are relevant to your fundamental interests, even if they
don’t match your original idea exactly.

8. Where can I get funding for research?

The OUR currently offers three kinds of grants. The first (Undergraduate Research
Support) are small awards (up to $750) for those who need essential supplies to go
forward with a feasible research project. Due to limited resources, we are unable to
award supply grants to students who are working in funded laboratories. The second
(Undergraduate Travel Awards) are to support undergraduates who are presenting
their research at professional conferences, or performing at off-campus sites. All
students, including those in funded laboratories, are encouraged to apply for these
Travel Awards to present their work at such off-campus venues. The third (Summer
Undergraduate Research Fellowships) are major awards (at least $3000) to enable
undergraduates to engage in research, scholarship or creative performance under the
guidance of faculty advisors (and possibly also graduate student mentors) for at least 9 weeks (20 hours/week) during the summer. Applications for the Research Support and Travel Awards are considered each month, while applications for the SURFs are considered once a year. Consult the Applications and Deadlines section of the OUR website for more information.

9. **How can I find out more about the research that faculty are doing, especially faculty who might be willing to mentor me?**

Departmental websites include links to faculty research interests, and are often organized by sub-disciplines. Campus librarians can help you find publications authored by Carolina faculty in particular disciplines. You might want to talk with faculty and graduate students in your courses and ask for suggestions of other faculty who are working in your areas of interest. The OUR maintains a database of research opportunities posted by faculty. The OUR also maintains an archive of student projects chosen for Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships together with the faculty advisors of those projects, as well as an archive of abstracts presented at the annual campus Celebration of Undergraduate Research symposium, including the faculty advisors. All of these resources are searchable by discipline and keyword. The majority of faculty on our campus serve as advisors for undergraduate research projects each year, so your chances of finding a suitable advisor are high. However, not all faculty have openings every semester, so if you can be flexible and persistent, you are most likely to find a suitable faculty advisor.

10. **How can the Office for Undergraduate Research help me?**

    The resources of the OUR can help to empower you to take the next step that you need in order to engage in undergraduate research. We hope that all students will use these resources in ways appropriate to their situations and feel welcomed into the communities of performance, scholarship and research that comprise the Carolina campus. We look forward to helping you to pursue topics of your greatest intellectual and creative interests, and to communicate the results through campus symposia, publications, and professional meetings.